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## Hesiod and *Hávamál*: Transitions and the Transmission of Wisdom

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Study of Hesiod's *Works and Days* has long profited from comparative analyses.<sup>2</sup> Akkadian, Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hebrew wisdom literature has all been brought to bear on the archaic Greek poem. Many of the *Works and Days*' maxims find parallels in, for example, the Akkadian *Counsels of Wisdom*, or the Egyptian *Instruction* texts. Hesiod's myths about the creation of mankind recall stories such as the Babylonian *Enuma Eliš* and the first part of *Atrahasis*, or the Biblical narrative of Adam and Eve. Studies such as those of Penglase (1994), West (1997), and Haubold (2013) have tracked the influence of the Near East on Greek literature and culture, positing the fourteenth and the ninth centuries BCE as particular hot-beds of intercultural exchange. It is not too much of a stretch to posit that an archaic Greek poet would have been aware of Near Eastern poetry. However, this is not necessarily the case. Whether parallels between the *Works and Days* and extant Near Eastern wisdom literature indicate diachronic reception or synchronic cultural similarity is a bit of a grey area. For example, Hesiod is concerned throughout the *Works and Days* with ideas of measure and balance.<sup>3</sup> Egyptian wisdom texts have the same preoccupation: *The Instruction of Amen-em-Opet* chapter 16 reads "Do not lean on the scales nor falsify the weights, / Nor damage the fractions of the measure. . . ," and indeed they have the ape god Thoth guarding the balance ("Which god is as great as Thoth?"). Was Hesiod's interest piqued by the Egyptian wisdom tradition, or was due measure in all things simply a common cultural concern?<sup>4</sup> It is not only the possibility of direct influence that makes these comparative studies so compelling. They also give us a glimpse into another tradition: a tradition developing along similar lines and at a similar stage, being guided by poets with similar preoccupations, and being shaped for audiences with similar concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to the anonymous readers of this article for their rigorous comments, and to Professor Peter Dronke for his suggestions. In particular I would like to thank warmly Professor Meg Alexiou for her invaluable advice and encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> Studies of the *Theogony*, often compared with the Babylonian *Enuma Eliš*, have benefited from comparative analysis as well.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Works and Days* 349-51, 370-72, 648, 694, 719-20.

<sup>4</sup> And one not restricted to wisdom literature: we might think of the reforms of weights and measures in archaic Greek law, enacted by Solon (Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 10) and the proto-tyrant Pheidon of Argos (Herodotus 6.127.3).

They show us that the handing down of wisdom is a cultural inevitability and that certain forms of its expression are constants.

In this article I too offer a comparative analysis. However, I step away from the Near East and away from any suggestion of a chain of transmission. I aim to offer fresh insights into Hesiod's *Works and Days* by comparing it to the Eddic *Hávamál*, a poem far removed in terms of geography and date, but compellingly close in subject matter, construction, and transmission. Those who have studied *Hávamál*, just like Hesiodic scholars, have tied themselves in knots trying to disentangle the strands of authorship and the narrative threads. *Hávamál* is, like the *Works and Days*, a wisdom poem with a composite structure. It is made up not only of precepts and maxims but also elaborate mythological sections. It is associated with catalogic elements which may be original or later accretions, just like Hesiod's *Days*, or the *Catalogue of Women*, or the *Ornithomanteia*. And most interestingly it is, like the *Works and Days*, a poem rooted in oral tradition, but poised at that crucial juncture: the advent of writing.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* is unique in archaic poetry. In particular, it is the balance between modes of reading which Hesiod maintains throughout the *Works and Days* that proves truly striking. Both wisdom texts and epic poems can be (and were) read in their entirety and excerpted. But the *Works and Days* is unique in inviting these two modes of reading in roughly equal measure. I have yet to find an archaic wisdom text from Greece or the Near East with such a strong narrative framework as the *Works and Days*—one with dynamic threads evolving over the course of the poem and with an addressee whose behaviour gradually changes or a focus which consistently and inexorably narrows.<sup>5</sup> Wisdom texts may be read from beginning to end, but they definitely lend themselves more readily to division and cherry-picking. They fall apart far more easily than they hang together. At the other end of the scale is heroic epic. Homer was, like Hesiod, quoted in lieu of evidence in the Athenian law-courts; in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* Homeric excerpts were pitted against Hesiodic; elements of the Homeric epics could be rendered open, applicable, and ready for a new interpretation simply by being detached from their contexts. Take, for example, Penelope's dream in *Odyssey* 19; it is ambiguous enough to need Odysseus as interpreter. However, the sheer force of the epic narrative framework—both within a particular poem and in the wider context of the epic cycle with the weight of tradition behind it—makes the linear reading irresistibly the stronger. The *Works and Days* is worthy of note because of the balanced way in which the two modes of reading interact. The narrative threads are strong yet not binding, the individual elements cohesive yet not immobile. The readings are evenly matched. When such a unique poem finds its partner in crime, therefore, it is worth crossing the distance through time and space to bring the two together.

*Hávamál* is an Old Icelandic poem, part of the Poetic Edda preserved in the thirteenth-century CE *Codex Regius*.<sup>6</sup> It consists of various sections, distinguished and separated out to varying degrees by different scholars: they are known as the Gnostic Poem (a series of precepts and maxims), Óðinn's examples (two stories of the god's love affairs), *Loddfáfnismál* (advice

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<sup>5</sup> On these threads see espec. Clay 2003 and 2009.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of and an overview of scholarship on the manuscript see, for example, Vésteinn Ólason 2010:227-52. In this article I use the terms Old Norse and Old Icelandic interchangeably. Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian make up the Old West Norse dialect of Old Norse.

given to one Loddfáfnir by Óðinn), *Rúnatal* (rune lore and ritual), and *Ljóðatal* (a list of spells). These sections cover the full range of precepts and admonitions, a hearty dose of myth and intrigue, and a hefty catalogic element—essentially a very Hesiodic structure. With the Gnostic Poem we might compare the series of precepts at *Works and Days* 286-382, or that at 695-764. The mythological element finds its correlate at *Works and Days* 42-201 with the myths surrounding the creation of mankind: indeed, just as Hesiod offers two myths (Prometheus and Pandora, 42-105; the Myth of the Races, 106-201), so Óðinn relates two stories of his exploits (Billing's daughter, 97-102; Gunnlōð and the mead of poetry, 105-10). *Hávamál* concludes with a list of spells, much as the *Works and Days* ends with a list of good and bad days. In both cases it seems at first glance as though "Enumeration gives superficial unity to a sequence of disparate material" (Larrington 1993:62); however, in both poems the material is in fact not all that disparate. Larrington has shown that in *Ljóðatal* at least seven of the spells evoke concerns from earlier in the poem and others consider characteristics of Óðinn (1993:63), while Lardinois (1998) shows convincingly that Hesiod's Days section (765-828) too has thematic ties with the rest of the poem.<sup>7</sup> At *Hávamál* 81 the meter changes. Here the poet launches into a calendar that gives the right times and the right seasons to engage in various activities (*Hávamál* 81-83<sup>8</sup>):

At kveldi skal dag leyfa,  
kono er brend er,  
mæki er reyndr er,  
mey er gefin er,  
ís er yfir kóm, r,  
öl er drukkit er.

Í vindi skal við höggva,  
veðri á síó róa,  
myrkri við man spialla—  
morg ero dags augo.  
Á skip skal skridar orka,  
en á skiöld til hlifar,  
mæki höggs,  
en mey til kossa.

Við eld skal öl drekka,  
en á ísi skriða,  
magran mar kaupa,  
en mæki saurgan—  
heima hest feita,  
en hund á búi.

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<sup>7</sup> Canevaro 2013 traces Hesiod's attitude to women as one of these ties.

<sup>8</sup> All *Hávamál* text and translation is taken from Dronke 2011.

At evening one shall praise a day,  
 a wife when she's burnt,  
 a blade when it's tried,  
 a maid when she's married,  
 ice when it's crossed,  
 ale when it has been drunk.

In wind one shall hew wood,  
 in good weather row out to sea,  
 gossip with a girl in the dark—  
 day's eyes are many.  
 From a ship one must get gliding,  
 from a shield protection,  
 from a sword a stroke,  
 and from a girl kisses.

Beside the fire one shall drink ale,  
 but on ice one shall skate,  
 buy a nag skinny,  
 and a sword unsoured—  
 fatten the horse at home,  
 but your hound at a neighbour's.

Hesiod too marks out his agricultural calendar (383-617) as something a little different from the earlier part of the poem (*Works and Days* 383-84<sup>9</sup>):

Πληιάδων Ἀτλαγενέων ἐπιτελλομενάων  
 ἄρχεσθ' ἀμήτου, ἀρότοιο δὲ δυσομενάων·

When the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, rise,  
 begin reaping: begin ploughing when they set.

The section is clearly marked out from the preceding lines by the first seasonal indicators, the Pleiades. Line 383 is striking in form, being an unusual three-word hexameter line. Line 384, “ἄρχεσθ’” (“begin”), then marks out a new start, a poetological reference that provides a link with the *Theogony* proem and the *Homeric Hymns*, as Tsagalis (2009:128) has observed: “The poetological function of ἄρχομαι is guaranteed by its traditional referentiality, i.e. its metonymic use in epic poetry.” In some manuscripts the Calendar was even signified by a rubricated letter or the title “βίβλος δεύτερος” (“second book”).

In both poems the relationships between narrator and addressee are complex. The *Works and Days* is held together by the voice of a single narrator, but the addressee changes. Hesiod

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<sup>9</sup> All *Works and Days* text is taken from West 1978. Translations are my own.

addresses Perses and the kings explicitly, yet at times he speaks of the kings in the third person and for a long tract of the poem ignores Perses entirely (397-611); he offers advice to a wider audience yet does not specify who they are or how his teachings might be relevant to them; he focuses on a male audience (“ἄνδρες” 3) yet at 538 tells them to weave. The fable of the hawk and the nightingale (202-12) is intended for the kings (“νῦν δ’ αἶνον βασιλεῦς ἐρέω” 202), yet its moral is directed to Perses (“ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δ’ ἄκουε Δίκης” 213). Similarly, *Hávamál*’s Gnostic Poem proper is targeted at a general audience, but *Loddfáfnismál* (marked out by a large capital initial) is directed to Loddfáfnir. Furthermore, there is the added complication that in *Hávamál* narrator and addressee overlap.<sup>10</sup> The refrain of *Loddfáfnismál* (first at stanza 112) runs:

Ráðomk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
at þú ráð nemir,  
níóta mundo ef þú nemr,  
þér muno gód ef þú getr:

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
to accept advice—  
you’ll do well if you do—  
it will be good for you if you get it:

However, at this point the narrator may well be the very same Loddfáfnir (Stray-Singer).<sup>11</sup> He is a wandering bard (“*Mál er at þylia / þular stóli á*” [“It is time to chant on the chanter’s throne”] 111), relating the advice given to him by others. At other points, the narrator seems to be Óðinn himself; stanzas 97-102, for example, tell the story of Óðinn’s unsuccessful love affair with Billing’s daughter—a story told as by its protagonist (“*Billings mey / ek fann beðiom á*” [“The daughter of Billingr I found in bed”] 97).<sup>12</sup> At still other points, the first person narration persists but with seemingly no particular identity. As Evans (1986:6) notes, “it is simply the man of experience speaking in his own person.” In switching between addressees, both poems engage with multiple audiences simultaneously. They widen the scope of their appeal and the applicability of their teachings, thus increasing their didactic value. Hesiod’s fable of the hawk and the nightingale, for example, is most effective in that it cannot be mapped directly onto any one character in the *Works and Days* but rather combines elements relevant to multiple addressees, explicit or implied. Though *Hávamál*’s narrator does not remain constant, the level of didactic authority assumed remains as consistent as in the *Works and Days*. Whether the teacher is Loddfáfnir, Óðinn, or some unspecified sonorous voice, the audience is inclined to take note.

<sup>10</sup> See Clunies Ross 1990.

<sup>11</sup> See Evans 1986:26 and 125 for discussion of the name Loddfáfnir.

<sup>12</sup> The first person pronoun *ek* appears for the first time in stanza 13, where the reference to Gunnlōð shows that the speaker must be Óðinn.

The narrators in both poems are characterized by their knowledge and experience. Loddfáfnir's words are lent authority by their divine provenance and Hesiod's teachings are ratified by the Muses (658-62); Óðinn can advise on women because of his own love affairs, and Hesiod can teach about seafaring because he made a voyage himself—however short it may have been (650-51). In neither case is the narrator reticent about making his qualifications clear: in *Hávamál*, each stanza of *Ljóðatal* is introduced with “I know how to. . .” (“*kann ek*”); in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod claims that he will tell the Myth of the Races “well and skillfully” (“*εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως*” 107). Both Hesiod and Óðinn give autobiographical narratives of their poetic initiation: Hesiod tells how he dedicated a tripod to the Muses in the place where they set him on the path of song (658-59), and Óðinn relates how he came by the mead of poetry (105-10).

In both poems the narrators keep the didactic upper hand through the use of riddling language. In the *Works and Days* Hesiod criticizes the kings for their ignorance (40-41):

νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασιν ὅσῳ πλέον ἤμισυ παντός,  
οὐδ' ὅσον ἐν μαλάχῃ τε καὶ ἀσφοδέλῳ μέγ' ὄνειαρ.

Fools, they do not know how much more the half is than the whole,  
nor how much value there is in mallow and asphodel.

These lines are made up of oxymoronic formulations (“ὅσῳ πλέον ἤμισυ παντός”), and Hesiod never actually tells us what the great advantage of these plants might be. He highlights the gap in knowledge between himself, in touch with the working man, and the kings, who foolishly scorn honest poor fare in their pursuit of wealth gained through corruption. Similarly, *Hávamál* 14 presents the paradox of the drunk with his wits about him:

ǫlr ek varð,  
varð ofrǫlvi,  
at ins fróða Fialars.  
Því er ǫldr bazt,  
at aptr uf heimtir  
hverr sitt geð gumi.

Ale-drunk I was,  
excessively drunk,  
within wise Fialarr's walls.  
The best thing about ale  
is that every man  
gets his wits back again.

The paradoxical language highlights the gap between narrator, who can drink with impunity, and addressees, who are not so privileged (*Hávamál* 12):

Era svá gott,

sem gott kveða,  
 þl alda sonom,  
 þviat færa veit,  
 er fleira drekkir,  
 síns til geðs gumi.

It is not so good  
 as they say it is good,  
 ale for the sons of men,  
 for a man knows less  
 the more he drinks  
 the sense of what he is saying.

Further, I suggest that both poems use metaphorical language to describe different phases in a man's life. In neither instance is the meaning entirely clear, but a comparison between the two highlights the possibility in each case. In the *Works and Days* one of Hesiod's practical recommendations has metaphorical potential (368-69):

ἀρχομένου δὲ πίθου καὶ λήγοντος κορέσασθαι,  
 μεσσόθι φείδεσθαι: δειλὴ δ' ἐν πυθμένι φειδώ.

When the jar is just opened or nearly empty, take your fill·  
 be sparing in the middle. Sparing at the dregs is useless.

Some critics are concerned primarily with what was *in* the jar, the *communis opinio* being wine.<sup>13</sup> However, this precept is less about how best to use wine, and more about when to be cautious and frugal. The scholia suggest it may refer to one's time of life: enjoy yourself in childhood and old age, but work in between them.<sup>14</sup> In *Hávamál* 134 the slang use of *belgr* ("skin bag") for the human body lends a similar metaphorical—even satirical (Dronke 2011:46)—resonance to this passage:

at három þul  
 hlæðu aldregi;  
 opt er gott þat er gamlir kveða;  
 opt ór skörpom belg  
 skilin orð koma,  
 þeim er hangir með hám

<sup>13</sup> Already at Σ*Op.*(Pertusi)369a ὁ γὰρ μεταξύ οἶνος ἰσχυρότερος ἅμα καὶ ἐπίμονος ("for the wine in the middle is both stronger and long-lasting").

<sup>14</sup> Σ*Op.*(Pertusi)368b τινὲς δὲ ἀλληγορικῶς τὸν λόγον εἶναι τῆς ἡλικίας ὥστε ἀρχόμενον αὐτὸν καὶ γηρῶντα ἀπολαύειν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν μέσσην ἡλικίαν ἐργάζεσθαι. Similarly, a Mesopotamian proverb reads "Very soon he will be dead; (so he says), "Let me eat up (all I have)!" Soon he will be well; (so he says), "Let me economize!" (A. K 4347.57).



ok skollir með skrá  
ok váfir með vilmögum.

at a grey-haired chanter  
you must never guffaw  
—often it is excellent, what old men say  
—often from a shriveled skin bag  
shrewd words come—  
from one who hangs among the hides,  
vacillates among the vellums  
and sidles to and fro among the house servants.

Dronke (2011:45) notes that in this stanza “interpretation is particularly difficult.” She suggests that the wrinkled leather bag is what the old chanter has become through his “long and learned life,” and that the image developed is of “him as a dried-up skin hanging (or hanging about) with others of his own kind, taking a shaky look into vellum manuscripts.” She concludes: “This may well not be the solution of these lines, but I suspect that they are intended as a conundrum.” Both poems use riddles to hide meaning, and in linking such opaque forms with ideas of age they reflect on different stages in life in both practical and intellectual terms.

In both poems the narrator also marks a divide between what the teacher knows and what the audience can learn. As Quinn notes (2010:197), it is “an interpretive crux in the reading of *Hávamál* to distinguish what is transferable knowledge to a human audience and what is Odinic display.” Hesiod more than once follows up a phrase such as “παῦροι δέ τ’ ἴσασιν” (“few know”) with evidence that he is in fact one of the lucky few.<sup>15</sup> These are didactic strategies that place expectations on an audience. In the first instance, taunting one’s audience with information just out of their reach encourages them to rise to the challenge. Hesiod provokes the kings, advertising his superior knowledge and inviting them to meet his intellectual standards. *Hávamál* likewise gives a tantalizing glimpse into divine knowledge, making mortals yearn for more. Secondly, such strategies mean that the audience are not simply being spoon-fed facts, but are being forced to work for their lesson. Quinn (2010:216) comments on *Hávamál*: “Often the tone of the advice is cryptic . . . and the focus of advice shifts unpredictably. The importance of being able to assess the right degree of caution—or of anything—underlines the fact that there is more to learning from advice than simply remembering the formulation of it.”<sup>16</sup> The poem concludes with a wish that the audience put its teachings into practice: “Let him profit who learned! Fortune to those who listened!” (“*Níóti sá er nam! / Heilir þeirs hlýddo!*” 165). The intellectual gap between narrator and addressee thus creates a didactic hierarchy (the narrator has the upper

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<sup>15</sup> 814 παῦροι δ’ αὖτε ἴσασι, 824 παῦροι δέ τ’ ἴσασιν, and also 818 παῦροι δέ τ’ ἀληθέα κικλήσκουσιν (“few call things truthfully”).

<sup>16</sup> Assessing the right degree of caution refers to *Hávamál*, “I beg you to be wary, but not over-wary” (131).

hand), a positive paradigm to emulate (the narrator is the intellectual model), and a method of teaching based on intellectual self-sufficiency: thinking for oneself.<sup>17</sup>

The parallels between the two poems persist not just in the methods of teaching, but in what is being taught. As mentioned above, Hesiod in the *Works and Days* is concerned with balance and measure, whether it be knowing the measure of the sea (“μέτρα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης” 648), or knowing the measure of every conceivable part of a plough (414-47). He also advises measure in speech (*Works and Days* 719-21):

γλώσσης τοι θησαυρὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἄριστος  
φειδωλῆς, πλείστη δὲ χάρις κατὰ μέτρον ἰούσης·  
εἰ δὲ κακὸν εἴπῃς, τάχα κ’ αὐτὸς μείζον ἀκούσῃς.

A sparing tongue is the best treasure among men,  
the greatest grace one which comes in measure.  
If you speak evil, quickly you will hear it more yourself.

In this passage Hesiod is concerned with the reciprocity of words (also at 709-11). Similarly the poet of *Hávamál* advises (42):

Vín sínom  
skal maðr vinr vera  
ok gialda giðf við giðf.  
Hlátr við hlátri  
skyli hǫldar taka,  
en lausung við lygi.

To his friend  
a man must be a friend,  
and pay back gift with gift.  
Good men should take laughter  
with a laugh,  
but lying with a lie.

*Hávamál* too is concerned with measure, not only in drinking (19) and wisdom (56), but also in exchanges with others (145):

Betra er óbedit  
en sé ofblótit—  
ey sér til gildis giðf.  
Betra er ósent

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<sup>17</sup> For self-sufficiency as a practical ideal in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, see below. For further discussion of Hesiod’s didactic methods and his concern with intellectual self-sufficiency, see Canevaro forthcoming 2015.

en sé ofsóit.

Better to have asked for nothing  
than sacrificed excessively—  
always a gift expects to be paid for.  
Better no souls escorted  
than too many lives smothered.

In both traditions relationships with others are conceived as reciprocal, whether in gift-giving or in speech. The kind of reciprocity Hesiod advocates is sometimes unequal, designed to tip the balance in one's own favor (*Works and Days* 349-51):

εὖ μὲν μετρεῖσθαι παρὰ γείτονος, εὖ δ' ἀποδοῦναι,  
αὐτῷ τῷ μέτρῳ, καὶ λώιον, αἶ κε δύνῃαι,  
ὥς ἂν χρηζὼν καὶ ἐς ὕστερον ἄρκιον εὔρης.

Measure out well from your neighbor, but give back well too,  
in the same measure, or even more, if you are able,  
so that being in need later you might find something to rely on.

Hesiod advocates giving a little extra, not for altruistic reasons, but so that in the next transaction the principle of reciprocity will give one the upper hand. Like much of Hesiod's teachings, the principle of reciprocity operates on a long-term basis. The one who gives the least in an exchange will be indebted to the one who gives the most and will be expected to reciprocate at some point. According to Hesiod, therefore, it is better to give more, so that rather than being in someone else's debt, someone else will be in yours. *Hávamál* also takes a long-term view, as "always a gift expects to be paid for" (145)—however, here the predominant strategy is frugality, rather than calculated largesse.

Friendship too is depicted as a delicate balance, one that you should not be the first to disrupt. *Hávamál* advises similar caution: "with your friend never be first to cut the flow of good feeling" ("vin þínom / ver þú aldregi / fyrri at flaumslitom" 121). If a friend should cause a disruption, however, there is little turning of the other cheek, and Hesiod in fact advises two eyes for an eye (*Works and Days* 707-11):

μηδὲ κασιγνήτῳ ἴσον ποιεῖσθαι ἐταῖρον·  
εἰ δέ κε ποιήσῃ, μή μιν πρότερος κακὸν ἔρξεις,  
μηδὲ ψεύδεσθαι γλώσσης χάριν· εἰ δὲ σέ γ' ἄρχῃ  
ἧ τι ἔπος εἰπὼν ἀποθύμιον ἧ καὶ ἔρξας,  
οἷς τόσα τείνυσθαι μεμνημένος·

Do not make a friend equal to a brother:  
but if you should do so, do not wrong him first,  
nor lie by the grace of your tongue. But if he should wrong  
you first, either by word or deed,

be mindful to pay him back two-fold.

As Millet (1984:101) notes, good relations are to be of such a kind “that you are the equal or superior of your neighbour, and do not end up in a position of dependence.” In other words, you should keep the upper hand whenever possible. In this way reciprocity goes hand-in-hand with Hesiod’s Iron-Age ideal: self-sufficiency.

I have already mentioned above the way in which the intellectual gap between narrator and addressee encourages intellectual self-sufficiency. I will now consider self-sufficiency as a prevailing theme in rather more concrete senses. Hesiod’s ideal farmer should be resourceful, weaving (538), sewing (544), and creating all his farming accouterments seemingly single-handedly (423-36). He should focus on his own *oikos* as his first priority (“οἶκον μὲν πρώτιστα” 405) and distrust the outside world (“οἴκοι βέλτερον εἶναι, ἐπεὶ βλαβερὸν τὸ θύρηφιν” 365). If help must be called for, it should be in the form of a 40-year-old farmhand who will concentrate on his task rather than being distracted by companions (443). Women are regarded with suspicion, especially as they pose a threat to production (373-75).<sup>18</sup> The ideal family model is tight-knit; one should choose for a wife a girl who lives nearby (700), and there should be only one heir so that the *oikos* will not be diminished by division (376).<sup>19</sup> Hesiod’s brand of reciprocity does not undermine self-sufficiency because it does not involve *reliance* on others but is concerned with establishing good relations with neighboring *oikoi* in order that your own *oikos* is not put at risk. Indeed, dependence on others is disparaged throughout the *Works and Days*. Hesiod’s brother Perses, the negative paradigm—the example not to follow—has to be warned off begging (394-404 and 453-54). Idle men are stingless drones who feast on the labor of the bees (304-06). The goal of the self-sufficient farmer should be to have enough *bios* stored up to meet the needs of his own *oikos*—to be not the beggar, but the one others come to beg from (*Works and Days* 477-78):

εὐοχθέων δ’ ἵξεαι πολὺν ἔαρ, οὐδὲ πρὸς ἄλλους  
αὐγάσαι, σέο δ’ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ κεχρημένος ἔσται.

You will come to grey spring well provided, so that you will not look to others, but another man will be in need of you.

These ideas of the self-sufficiency of the *oikos* and the disgrace of begging are discussed also in *Hávamál* (36-37):

Bú er betra,  
þótt [ber]t sé:  
halr er heima hvern.  
Þótt tvær geitr eigi  
ok taugreptan sal,

<sup>18</sup> On Hesiod’s attitude to women as governed by his concern for self-sufficiency see Canevaro 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Lines 379-80 give an alternative scenario.

þat er þó betra en böen.

Bú er betra,  
þótt [ber]t sé:  
halr er heima hvern.  
Blóðugt er hiarta  
þeim er biðia skal  
sér í mál hvert matar.

A homestead is better,  
even though it may be bare:  
every man is his own man at home.  
Though his assets are two goats  
and a tow-roofed room,  
that is still better than begging.

A homestead is better,  
even though it may be bare:  
every man is his own man at home.  
Bleeding is the heart  
of one who must beg  
a morsel for himself every mealtime.

The poet of *Hávamál* argues that home is better (compare *Works and Days*, “οἵκοι βέλτερον εἶναι, ἐπεὶ βλαβερόν τὸ θύρηφιν” 365), that one should start with a house and livestock (compare *Works and Days*, “οἶκον μὲν πρότιστα γυναῖκά τε βοῦν τ’ ἀποτῆρα” 405), and that begging is a mark of failure. The delicate Hesiodic balance between maintaining reciprocal relationships and establishing one’s own self-sufficiency rings true also in this passage from *Hávamál*. As Larrington (1993:31) comments on these stanzas: “The emphasis hitherto on receiving the hospitality of others is counterbalanced by a paradigm of independence.” Evans (1986:18) summarizes: “The dominant image in the Gnostic Poem, the implied recipient of the advice proffered, is that of the solitary.” Being self-sufficient in one’s home is preferable to begging from others, even if that home be a humble hut—*Hávamál* does not go after riches, but values frugality if it means independence. Similarly at *Works and Days* 40-41 given above, Hesiod champions frugal but honest living over unjust gain by the gift-swallowing kings.<sup>20</sup>

In the Hesiodic passage 477-78 given above, the upper hand of reciprocity is suggested by not begging, but having others beg from you. This raises another important *Works and Days* issue: that of reputation. The precept combines self-sufficient ideals with the importance of reputation: you must be well-prepared, and *known* to be so. A few lines later, it is made explicit that one of the problems with poverty is that few will admire you: “παῦροι δέ σε θήσονται” 482. At line 721, also quoted above, Hesiod is concerned with the reciprocity of words (εἰ δὲ

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<sup>20</sup> For frugality see also 368-69, 723.

κακὸν εὔπης, τάχα κ' αὐτὸς μεῖζον ἀκούσῃς, “If you speak evil, quickly you will hear it more yourself”): this is reputation in a nutshell. The importance of and mechanism behind reputation is worked out most fully at *Works and Days* 761-64:

φήμη γάρ τε κακὴ πέλεται, κούφη μὲν αἰεῖραι  
 ῥεῖτα μάλ', ἀργαλέη δὲ φέρειν, χαλεπὴ δ' ἀποθέσθαι.  
 φήμη δ' οὐ τις πάμπαν ἀπόλλυται, ἥντινα πολλοί  
 λαοὶ φημίζουσι· θεὸς νύ τίς ἐστι καὶ αὐτή.

For rumor is evil, light and easy to pick up,  
 but difficult to bear, and hard to get rid of.  
 That rumor is never entirely destroyed, which many  
 people rumor. She too is herself some goddess.

The poet of *Hávamál*, too, is concerned with reputation (76-77):

Deyr fê,  
 deyia frændr,  
 deyr siálfr it sama,  
 en orztírr  
 deyr aldregi  
 hveim er sér góðan getr.

Deyr fê,  
 deyia frændr,  
 deyr siálfr it sama;  
 ek veit einn  
 at aldri deyr:  
 dómr um dauðan hvern.

Cattle die,  
 kinsmen die,  
 one dies oneself just the same,  
 but the fame of renown  
 never dies  
 for any who earns himself that excellence.

Cattle die,  
 kinsmen die,  
 one dies oneself just the same.  
*Óðinn* I know one thing  
 that never dies:  
 judgement on every man dead.

In both traditions, rumor or reputation is something that outlives us all. *Hávamál*'s "fame of renown" is like *kleos*, the Homeric heroic ideal: "κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται" ("fame which never dies," *Iliad* 2.325, 7.91; *Odyssey* 24.196), "κλέος ἄφθιτον" ("imperishable fame"). Hesiod's *pheme* ("rumor"), however, is more the anti-*kleos* (Bakker 2002:140-42; Hardie 2012:50-58). Whilst *kleos* is to be heard about in positive terms, *pheme* is to be talked about negatively. That Hesiod is more concerned with *pheme* than with *kleos* marks his poem as firmly set in the Iron Age: he is composing in and about a post-heroic world. The analysis of *pheme* at *Works and Days* 760-64 takes us back to and makes us reassess the earlier line: "ὄν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὁμῶς ἄφατοί τε φατοί τε" (3), as noted by Clay (2003:148). There Zeus made men spoken of or not; here *pheme* is generated not by the gods but by "πολλοὶ λαοί" ("many people"). After the Calendar and countless precepts about daily life, we are now firmly entrenched in the Iron Age with its focus on mankind. In the earlier passage it was left unclear which was the positive, "ἄφατοί" or "φατοί;" now it is clear that to be "φατοί," "spoken of," is not something to wish for. The contrast with the heroic epic age could not be starker.

Not only rumor outlives us; we also leave behind our children to perpetuate our memory. As Svenbro (1993:65) summarizes, "The Greeks believed humans could achieve immortality in two ways: through 'generation' (*genesis*) or through 'renown' (*kléos*)."<sup>1</sup> Hesiod wishes (*Works and Days* 376-78):

μουνογενῆς δὲ πάις εἴη πατρώιον οἶκον  
 φερβέμεν· ὥς γὰρ πλοῦτος ἀέξεται ἐν μεγάροισιν·  
 γηραιὸς δὲ θάνοις ἕτερον παῖδ' ἐγκαταλείπων.

Let there be a single-born child to nourish his father's household:  
 for thus wealth increases in the halls.  
 May you die old, leaving behind another child.

Old Norse wisdom literature, too, is concerned with generation (*Hávamál* 72):

Sonr er betri,  
 þótt sé síð of alinn  
 eptir genginn guma.  
 Sialdan bautarsteinar  
 standa brauto nær,  
 nema reisi niðr at nið.

A son is better,  
 even though he may be born late,  
 after the father has died.  
 Seldom do gravestones  
 stand by the road,  
 unless kin erects them for kin.

Both passages focus on the benefits of having children. For Hesiod, an only child will increase the estate's fortunes; for the poet of *Hávamál*, a son can set up a memorial stone to his father. Both, too, are concerned with the age of the father. In the *Works and Days*, the wish that you may die old can be interpreted in various ways. It could be a negative reflection on the scenario in which you have "another child"<sup>21</sup>: if you have two children, you must ensure that you live long enough to keep an eye on them (after all, Hesiod's own relationship with his brother Perses is certainly strained). It could be quite the opposite: you will make it to old age if you have a child (or even two) to look after you. It could mark a distinction between what is necessary at different times in one's life: as an adult, having one child is best; in one's old age, safety in numbers is even better. In *Hávamál* a son is indisputably good—even if his father does not live to see him.

In the *Works and Days* the issue of reputation resurfaces in various guises. At 700-01 it even plays a role in choosing a wife:

τὴν δὲ μάλιστα γαμεῖν, ἥ τις σέθεν ἐγγύθι ναίει,  
πάντα μάλ' ἀμφὶς ἰδὼν, μὴ γείτοσι χάρματα γήμης.

In particular marry a woman who lives near you, having looked  
all around, so that you will not be a source of laughter for your neighbors.

A woman of the village is a known quantity, so less likely to end up a cause of humiliation. Furthermore, a bride living nearby fits with Hesiod's self-sufficient ideals. As a farmer would hope to have all the means of production within the *oikos*, so too he should not have to go far for a wife. Indeed the question of marriage and of women's worth in general is, for Hesiod, inextricably linked with the self-sufficiency of the *oikos*. Hesiod's suspicion of women is based on the fact that they consume resources and increase the need for livelihood.<sup>22</sup> Hesiod's anxiety about women is part of what Brown (1997:26) terms the "male dilemma": sexual desire versus economic stability; family continuity versus problems of property and inheritance (Clay 2003:120). This tension is made nowhere more clear than at *Works and Days* 373-75:

μηδὲ γυνή σε νόον πυγοστόλος ἐξαπατάτω  
αἰμύλα κωτίλλουσα, τειὴν διφῶσα καλιήν·  
ὃς δὲ γυναικὶ πέποιθε, πέποιθ' ὃ γε φιλήτησιν.

Don't let a woman with a tarted-up arse deceive your mind  
with cajoling words, while she rifles around in your granary.  
He who trusts a woman, trusts a cheat.

This passage bears a striking resemblance to *Hávamál* 84:

<sup>21</sup> This "other child" is also debated. Some commentators explain it away by interpreting "ἕτερον παῖδ'" either as the first and only son (Moschopoulos explains "ἕτερον" as "ἄλλον ἀντὶ σοῦ"; Verdenius 1985 "another, namely your son"), or the only child of the second generation, a grandson (West 1978).

<sup>22</sup> See Canevaro 2013.



Meyiar orðom  
 skyli manngi trúa,  
 né því er kveðr kona,  
 þvíat á hverfanda hvéli  
 vóru þeim hiörto sköpuð,  
 bríð í bríóst um lagið.

A maiden's words  
 must no man trust,  
 nor what a woman says,  
 for on a whirling wheel  
 were hearts fashioned for them  
 and fickleness fixed in their breast.

Evans (1986:23) suggests that this suspicion of women “is alien to the pagan Nordic tradition and reflects the misogynist attitudes of medieval Christianity,” however the parallel with the *Works and Days* shows that such wariness is not out of place in an agrarian society in which so much depends on productivity and providing for one's household. In neither the Nordic nor the Greek tradition is a woman's word to be trusted. In fact, the poet of *Hávamál* lumps together women and ships under the heading of “unpredictable phenomena” (90)<sup>23</sup> and Hesiod is as suspicious of seafaring as he is of women. In *Hávamál*, this fickle female condition is presented as innate, as something evident from the moment of woman's creation: women were made to be untrustworthy. Similarly, in the *Works and Days* the main threats Hesiod describes—the woman's appearance and her words—can both be linked back to Pandora, the first woman, the “καλὸν κακόν” (*Theogony* 585) whose beautiful appearance stood in contrast to her deceitful nature. When Pandora was created Hermes gave her “αἰμυλίους τε λόγους” (“wily words” 78), just as the woman at 374 speaks “αἰμύλα.”

In choosing a wife, Hesiod recommends she who lives nearby (“ἐγγύθι ναίει” 700). Though this is in the interests of self-sufficiency, it is not without its risks. In the proverb of the two roads, someone else lives nearby (“ἐγγύθι ναίει”): “κακότης,” or misfortune (*Works and Days* 287-92):

τὴν μὲν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἐστὶν ἐλέσθαι  
 ῥηιδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·  
 τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἰδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν  
 ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτήν  
 καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὶ δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,  
 ῥηιδίῃ δὴ πειτα πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ εὐῶσα.

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<sup>23</sup> Compare the Greek proverb attributed to Menander (*Monosticha* 231): “θάλασσα καὶ πῦρ, καὶ γυνὴ τρίτον κακόν” (“sea and fire, and woman the third evil”).

Misfortune can be achieved in abundance and  
 easily, for the way is smooth and she lives very nearby.  
 But in front of excellence the immortal gods have put  
 sweat. And the path to her is long and steep  
 and difficult at first. But when you come to the top,  
 then it is easy, although difficult.

This passage was the most quoted of the *Works and Days* in antiquity (Koning 2010). It is detachable, applicable, catchy, mnemonic—it has all the ingredients of a pearl of wisdom. However, it is not exactly straightforward, as the final lines are paradoxical: the road is easy, although difficult. It is difficult to achieve “ἀρετή,” and once achieved, it is difficult to maintain, but given its positive effects it is easy to bear. *Hávamál* features a very similar proverb, and that too is somewhat convoluted (34):

Afhvarf mikit  
 er til illz vinar,  
 þótt á brauto búi,  
 en til góðs vinar  
 liggja gagnvegir,  
 þótt hann sé firr farinn.

It is a big detour  
 to a bad friend's home,  
 though he lives in your lane;  
 but to a good friend's home  
 the roads go straight,  
 though he may be a longer way away.

An enemy lives nearby, just like “κακότης,” and a friend is further away. However, it is worth making the longer journey; in spite of appearances, ultimately the friend will be easier to reach.

This brief summary of the similarities in structure and content between the *Works and Days* and *Hávamál* shows that there is substantial overlap in terms of narrative forms, themes, tropes, and concerns. Before attempting to offer some explanations and conclusions, I would like now to address one further area of overlap: the trajectory of scholarship on the two poems. At the beginning of this article I divided *Hávamál* into sections. Scholars by and large agree that these sections were not originally composed together, but are rather separate oral poems which later coalesced. As to process and purpose, scholars have not reached a *communis opinio*, but they identify an approximate trend. Karl Müllenhoff (1891) began by suggesting that *Hávamál* was an anthology of Odinic poems. Klaus von See (1972) went a step further and posited that traditional material did not come together by chance and a shared subject matter, but was put together by one “Redaktor.” Carolyne Larrington (1993:60) sees in that Redaktor a guiding purpose: “the revelation of the many forms which wisdom takes.” John McKinnell (2007) refines the model, suggesting that the text went through three stages of development: a grouping together of Odinic

poems, followed by the interpolation of scraps of practical verse, and finally “editorial” additions designed to impose unity.

Such an intellectual trajectory will be familiar to scholars of the *Works and Days*. In the nineteenth century with the development of textual criticism as a discipline and the production of critical editions of the Hesiodic corpus, questions of authorship (what was and was not “Hesiodic”) were foremost.<sup>24</sup> In the twentieth century, however, it was agreed that the *Works and Days* is largely comprised of traditional material which at some point coalesced, and so scholars stopped thinking in terms of the “original author.” West’s 1978 commentary made great strides in the understanding of the poem as traditional, with its compiled Near Eastern parallels.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent analyses then put the “author” back in, though now in a role akin to that of von See’s Redaktor. Scholars then began to focus on narrative threads, and like Larrington tried to pinpoint a guiding purpose.<sup>26</sup> The extent of Hesiod’s editorial role remains undetermined,<sup>27</sup> but the current state of scholarship bears a close resemblance to that regarding *Hávamál*. These are poems rooted in an oral tradition of wisdom, comprised of previously circulating elements combined in a way which gives them a structure and a purpose.<sup>28</sup>

This overview of the two analogous scholarly trajectories serves to introduce the final issue I would like to address in this article, one which I believe holds the key to explaining many of the similarities traced so far: the move from orality to literacy. Scholars of both poems have, on the one hand, isolated traditional elements perpetuated by a long process of oral transmission.

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<sup>24</sup> Goettling (1843) regarded the poem as a compilation of material produced by different hands. His view was quickly contested by Colonel Mure in his *History of Greek Literature*, who took up the opposing position that the *Works and Days* was composed by a single author, and the subsequent editor van Lennep (1847) often contested Goettling’s editorial decisions by arguing for the authenticity of the vulgate text. Paley in his 1861 edition adopted a more middle-of-the-road stance, taking great pains to investigate what was ‘genuine’ and what was not and concluding: “The pure metal of the true epic age may still exist, though it has suffered alloy in passing through many crucibles in the hands of many different workmen.”

<sup>25</sup> See also Walcot 1966.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Lardinois 1998 traces through the *Works and Days* the theme of the Iron-Age man having to live day-to-day, with the aim of rescuing the Days from brutal editing. Clay 2003 pinpoints a gradual spatial and temporal narrowing of focus, and follows the education of Perses as a narrative thread, and Clay 2009:71-90 traces a double ascent-descent pattern. Beye 1972, for instance, picks out inexorability as the poem’s focus, while Jones 1984 posits ὥραιοις and μέτρον as words that encapsulate the poem’s themes. Hamilton 1989 argues that the poem is defined by the two Erides; Nelson 1998 the dispensation of Zeus.

<sup>27</sup> For example Ercolani in his 2010 commentary attributes as much as possible to tradition, whereas in my own monograph on the *Works and Days* I am more interested in what Hesiod as Redaktor *did* with the traditional material, shaping it to fit his own didactic purpose.

<sup>28</sup> One reader of this article suggested a common Indo-European background to the two poems. Whilst such a possibility cannot be entirely discarded (see West 2007:71-72 for a comparison between Hesiod’s “I am going to tell you . . . Put it in your heart” and *Hávamál*’s “I counsel thee, Loddfáfnir, and take thou my counsel”), the themes and structures I trace here are broad, I believe too broad to be taken away from the authorial/editorial figure towards which current scholarship in both fields inclines. Even at the micro-level, Indo-European attribution is dubious: to take up West’s example, what are we to make of non-Indo-European parallels such as Proverbs 22.17-18 “Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart to my doctrine,” or the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* chapter one, “Give thine ear, and hear what I say, and apply thine heart to apprehend”? In the case of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, the possibility of Near Eastern influence complicates the matter. In general, I believe that the widespread nature of wisdom tropes and formulations has more to do with comparable cultural and social norms than with a shared linguistic and poetic inheritance.

On the other hand, they have also recognized a large degree of organization of material and coherency of purpose, which points to a guiding hand, and a high level of fixity, which ultimately results from a role played by writing. Neither poem is purely oral or pure literature: we can trace in both dual compositional forces. I argue here that such interactions between tradition and innovation can explain many of the shared structural idiosyncrasies, and can justify our bringing together two poems separated by more than a millennium and by two and a half thousand miles.

*Hávamál* is preserved in the thirteenth-century CE collection *Codex Regius*<sup>29</sup> but presumably was composed much earlier. Indeed the compiler of the Codex describes the poems several times as “*inn forni*,” “the ancient,” or as “*fornar sögur*,” “old stories,” coming from “*forneskja*,” “antiquity,” and included a few notes to help the thirteenth-century reader understand the wider mythological context of the poems. Much of the gnomic and mythological material comprising *Hávamál* can be attributed to the long-standing oral culture which preceded the advent of writing in Iceland with the arrival of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Icelandic culture had been primarily oral (with the exception of runes), with oral story-telling, oral genealogies, and oral law codes (Quinn 2000:30-60). Christianity then brought with it the Latin alphabet, which was gradually adapted to the Icelandic native tongue. However, the advent of a script did not mark the abrupt end of an oral culture and the start of a literate one. Literacy was at first something reserved for the elite, for clerics and scribes—not everyone could read and write, and so oral performances and recitations continued. As Mundal (2010:163) writes, “The oral culture continued to exist side by side with the new written culture which gradually gained ground.”<sup>31</sup> How quickly writing gained ground is uncertain: “At what point oral storytelling gave way to text-dependent recitations in Iceland is not clear” (Quinn 2000:46). In terms of poetic performance, there may have been a mid-point in which written versions of a poem were circulating but were used by the performer accustomed to the oral tradition as little more than a prompt. Similarly, the gnomic and mythological elements of Hesiod’s *Works and Days* are part of an oral tradition predating writing, and the poem was originally experienced in performance. Even if it was written down at an early stage, Hesiod’s society was still primarily oral and so a

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<sup>29</sup> So called because from the seventeenth century to the twentieth it was kept in the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Kellogg 1990. There are some similarities in the possible performance contexts of both poems, for example Dronke 2011:36 notes of *Hávamál* that “Many stanzas read as if they were the product of a party game: as if one of the company has to propose a thought or theme, and another is to complete it.” Similarly, excerpts from Hesiod’s *Works and Days* may have aired at symposia: the poem addresses themes relevant to such a context (715-23 and 742-5 advise on sympotic *mores*, and the summer festival scene 582-96 is almost a symposiarch’s handbook), the use of kennings and vivid descriptions such as the βασιλῆας δωροφάγους could be residual echoes of a sympotic game of *eikasmoi* or likenesses, and the introduction of new stories with e.g. νῦν δ’ (202) may serve to place pieces in a sequence of performances by the party-goers, following on one from the other.

<sup>31</sup> See also Kellogg 1990:189, 195: “even literate poets, such as might have recorded versions of eddic poetry, continue to compose in the old way until they lose the competence or until their audiences have been educated to tolerate new forms.”

written version, although perhaps again used as an *aide-mémoire* for the rhapsode, would have had little or no circulation among the audience.<sup>32</sup>

In both cultures we are talking about a continuum—a gradual shift from orality to literacy—with both *Hávamál* and the *Works and Days* caught up in the transition.<sup>33</sup> Both made it into the written tradition, but neither was born in its entirety with the advent of writing. We know *Hávamál* and the *Works and Days* from their written forms as they have come to us, unlike whatever versions had come before.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the *Works and Days*, however, this was not the only form circulating in antiquity. Our first clue that the *Works and Days* was performed comes already in the proem (1-10). Versions of the poem without its proem were known in antiquity: Pausanias (9.31.4-5) claimed that the Boeotians “remove the proem to the Muses, saying that it begins with the lines about the Strifes.” As Scodel (2012:112) points out, this optional nature of the proem “confirms [the poem’s] life as a performance script.” The most likely explanation for the omission is that Pausanias’ version represents a stage in performance in which the poem was prefaced by a context-specific prelude, and so the proem as we know it was elided. Indeed the *Homeric Hymns* are often thought to have been used as prefaces to epic recitations, hymning the god relevant to the performance context (Faulkner 2011a:17-19).<sup>35</sup> The proem as it has been preserved to us is characterized most strikingly not by its relevance to a particular context, but by its programmatic nature, dictating as it does the division of labor between Hesiod, Zeus, and the Muses which will work itself out over the course of the poem. Similarly the extant proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are also programmatic, unlike some of their predecessors.<sup>36</sup> The survival of programmatic proems is due to the fact that the versions we have are a “fixing by writing” (Ford 1992:1), the end product of a shift from an oral to a literate culture, and thus bound to have closer links with the main body of the poems than earlier versions would have had.

That writing creates fixity is fairly intuitive, but an example from Icelandic law might raise some further implications (Quinn 2000:32-40). Before the arrival of writing in Iceland, the law code was preserved orally, recited once a year at the *Althing* and memorized by, first and foremost, the lawspeaker. Interestingly, the oral law code had little in the way of mnemonic devices—the lawspeaker’s task certainly was not easy, and the role was one of great skill and great learning (a fact which goes against equations of “oral” with “primitive”). The authority of the law was in its recitation, so the lawspeaker had the power to add to or change the law while

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<sup>32</sup> On the oral nature of Greek society even after the advent of writing see Thomas 1992.

<sup>33</sup> The MA dissertation of Carlos Osvaldo Rocha, University of Iceland 2012, discusses *Hávamál* in terms of this transition from orality to literacy.

<sup>34</sup> I should point out here that the Codex Regius version of *Hávamál* is not considered to be the poem’s first written incarnation. See Lindblad 1954 for full argumentation and Evans 1986:2 for examples of scribal errors in the Codex caused by copying an earlier manuscript.

<sup>35</sup> See also Clay 2011.

<sup>36</sup> For different stages of a poem’s development reflected in a proem, see the extant variants on the *Iliad* proem: 1) Μούσας αἰίδω καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα κλυτότοξον, 2) ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, μοῦσαι, Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχουσαι, / ὅπως δὴ μῆνίς τε χόλος θ’ ἔλε Πηλεΐωνα / Λητοῦς τ’ ἀγλαὸν υἱόν· ὁ γὰρ βασιλῆι χολωθείς . . .

reciting it.<sup>37</sup> When laws were written down, they became more difficult to change, as amending lawcodes which had been written on vellum would have been time consuming and expensive. The reverse side to such fixity, however, was the possibility of conflicting versions. Whereas in an oral culture all that mattered was the current performance (that is, the recitation at this year's *Althing*), the advent of writing created multiple law codes which had to be negotiated. The act of writing shifted the power from the learned lawspeaker and his group of orally trained lawmen to the bishop in Skálholt, who held what was rather arbitrarily considered the decisive volume (Sigurðsson 2005:292). This example serves to highlight key issues relating to the transition between orality and literacy, not only fixity but also the balance between change and continuity, and the renegotiation of authority.

To return to the poems—both the *Works and Days* and *Hávamál* are transitional products, caught between orality and literacy, using and used by both. As such, diverse elements (various narrative forms, changing narrative voices, mix-and-match addressees, even different meters in the case of *Hávamál*) are selected from the tradition because they suit the purpose of a Redaktor, a compiler, the person or persons leading us inexorably towards a greater degree of fixity. Traditional units coalesce because they make a coherent didactic point or theme: but not necessarily because they fit together seamlessly and uniformly. Gnostic maxims, proverbs, and precepts are by nature detachable; they can therefore be rearranged or treated selectively in performance, and so any recording of them may easily be accused of omission, interpolation, disjointing, and so on.<sup>38</sup> Neither the *Works and Days* nor *Hávamál* can lay claim to structural perfection—indeed much scholarship on both poems has been concerned with reordering lines or stanzas, or tweaking the syntax here and there to smooth it out.<sup>39</sup> However, the fact that a structure *can* be deduced—narrative threads followed, an overarching focus isolated, intratextual references spotted—suggests that these poems are products of more than anonymous tradition alone. I am not convinced that all we find in the *Works and Days*, for example, can be attributed to an impersonal oral tradition that developed over centuries. I do not think that models of circumstantial development, such as Lamberton's "string of beads" (1988:22) or West's idea that Hesiod's themes evolved during the course of a recitation can adequately account for the level of structural design. There is evidence for a certain level of conscious crafting—the hand of an organizer or compiler with a coherent didactic purpose—and it is this coherent product which became fixed by writing.

There are important differences between the Greek continuum and the Nordic: the role of festivals and the context of performance, the role of city-states, the existence of competing

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<sup>37</sup> In fact according to Ari's *Íslendingabók* it was the lawspeaker who made the decision to convert Iceland to Christianity at the *Althing* of 1000 CE.

<sup>38</sup> The *Works and Days* could conceivably be performed at a festival, having showpieces, such as the woodcutting section (414-47) to display the rhapsode's skill, and a worthy moral impetus. In such a setting, we might envisage that the more prescriptive sections were treated selectively: perhaps a rhapsode would judge the audience's attention span and edit accordingly.

<sup>39</sup> Poems can even be remodeled entirely. Lindquist 1956 posited that the "original" *Hávamál* was an account of an initiation into Odinic wisdom, which then fell into the hands of a Christian zealot who spitefully retaliated by jumbling up the verses. Lindquist un-jumbles them for us.

traditions (of which the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* gives us a glimpse on the Greek side).<sup>40</sup> Here I would like to elaborate on two differences to give a sense of the complexity of the issue. First and foremost is the use of runes in the latter tradition (evident in the *Rúnatal* section of *Hávamál*). Runes were used for particular purposes, primarily memorializing, ownership, and magic (Quinn 2000:30). They appeared on rune stones which were set up to commemorate the dead, and as such perform a role very like that of Greek epigrams. However, unlike epigrams they *precede* their culture's primary transition from orality to literacy, representing a separate "rune literate" stage of development. Harris (2010) explores the effect this use of runes had on the Nordic oral tradition, arguing that Old Norse poetry, particularly author-ascribed skaldic poetry, displays "an element of literate mentality" (122). It is conceivable that such ground-work might have eased the poems' transition from oral to written form. Another difference is the way in which writing arrived in the respective cultures. As Kellogg (1990:194) notes, literacy "did not come as gently to the Germanic peoples as it did to the sixth-century Greeks. It came with the full force of Latin books, the Latin language, and Roman religion."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps then we should imagine a shorter continuum in Iceland than in Greece: one eased by rune literacy and swept along by Latin imports.

The transitional nature of both poems goes some way towards explaining their almost schizophrenic structures: on the one hand wildly diverse, on the other enticingly coherent. But what can it tell us about their content? Much of this study has been dedicated to showing that many themes, tropes, and concerns are shared by the two poems. Despite the striking similarities, however, I have refrained from any suggestion of a straight channel of reception. Not all scholars have been so cautious. Several attempts have been made to match up *Hávamál* with the Biblical Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Additionally, Roland Köhne (1972) has posited Cicero's *De Amicitia* as a partial source; Rolf Pipping (1949) has suggested that some stanzas stem from Seneca; and, most notably, von See, in his analysis of *Hávamál* (1972b), has posited the *Disticha Catonis* as a direct source for the Icelandic poem. Such arguments have been widely recognized as unconvincing and even a little far-fetched.<sup>42</sup> If we are convinced by the traditional provenance of many elements of *Hávamál*—and I think we should be—then they are likely to predate the arrival of Christianity, writing, and Latin treatises. More valuable still, I suggest, is interpreting the similarities as a reflection of comparable societies, or at least societies at comparable points in their developments. The question of orality versus literacy is one such comparandum, with the poems representing the same point on their respective oral/literate continuum. Furthermore, concerns with reputation, with self-sufficiency and reciprocity, with balance and measure: all are of particular relevance to both societies. Archaic Greece and Viking Scandinavia might not be

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<sup>40</sup> Particularly useful on the specifics of the oral/literate continuum and the crystallization of the Hesiodic poems into a Panhellenic form is Nagy 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Kellogg's specification "sixth century" is to be taken with a pinch of salt.

<sup>42</sup> Larrington (1991:155) concludes "The purpose of this article has been to consider the findings of four scholars concerned with extra-Scandinavian material in *Hávamál*. None of the parallels proposed has been convincing."

exactly parallel cultures, but they evidently share certain cultural concerns.<sup>43</sup> As agrarian societies with strong family and household structures, polytheistic religions, and honor codes,<sup>44</sup> it is understandable that they would offer similar advice in similar formulations through similar didactic strategies.<sup>45</sup> Larrington (1991:141) summarizes one particular scholarly approach to *Hávamál*: “While similarities of content with, for example, Old English wisdom verse could be ascribed to a common Germanic stock of ideas and expressions, where *Hávamál* appeared to echo a text from beyond the Germanic corpus, a different explanation had to be sought.” But must a common stock of ideas and expressions be so limited? It seems to me that even echoes which resound beyond the Germanic corpus ask not for a different explanation, but for an extension of the same: an understanding that stock ideas are common not to a particular cultural grouping, but to multiple, comparable cultures.

Walcot in his comparative study, *Greek Peasants, Ancient and Modern* (1970) defends comparative methodologies at the sociological level as being “able to penetrate beneath the surface of mere words and so come to grips with an attitude of mind which is likely to be totally baffling when surveyed from the comfort and security of an armchair” (10).<sup>46</sup> In this article I have shown that similarities between the two poems exist on the “surface of mere words.” We might add even more specific verbal similarities, such as the use of kennings, a typical feature of wisdom literature (indeed the word “*Hávamál*” itself is a kenning, referring to Óðinn but meaning literally “Words of the High One”).<sup>47</sup> But perhaps more importantly, I have shown that the poems express similar societal concerns—concerns from which, Walcot rightly points out, modern scholars are far removed. A comparative approach, then, takes us closer to understanding the “attitude of mind” of the Redactors of both the *Works and Days* and *Hávamál*: an attitude which is made clearer by its recurrence. As Larrington (1993:65) argues, “*Hávamál* is a coherent poem. The problems which readers have experienced in making sense of it in the past lie not in the text itself, but in the readers’ expectations of the genre.” Readers of the *Works and Days* too set themselves up for disappointment: “Hesiod will undoubtedly remain some way short of flawless in most readers’ eyes” (Morgan 2001:3). Perhaps this comparison can help us shift our expectations. Of course two poems do not a genre make—but the “unique” *Works and Days* now

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<sup>43</sup> They may in fact be closer than we think, as Hans van Wees’ paper “Attic Vikings” suggests. Indeed this paper shows how comparisons with Norse culture can be useful to ancient historians too: “We are not well-informed about the details of Greek sea-raiding, but we can make some inferences which are supported by medieval Norse parallels.”

<sup>44</sup> It is widely agreed that *Hávamál* is primarily pagan in content and was little influenced by Christianity.

<sup>45</sup> Postulating Indo-European roots of such formulae seems less useful than understanding the specific circumstances which encourage their use, particularly given the frequent parallels *outside* Indo-European languages (see note 28 for an example).

<sup>46</sup> We need not be derailed by Walcot’s terminology in this book: “peasant” is not intended in any derogatory or pejorative sense but merely indicates someone for whom “agriculture is a livelihood and a way of life, not a business for profit.” I agree that this is the case for Hesiod: throughout the *Works and Days* he portrays *kerdos*, profit, as something to treat with caution, he discredits seafaring (that is, travelling to trade), and he promotes self-sufficient livelihood (whether or not such self-sufficiency was a reality in Hesiod’s world is a separate issue from his persona in the poem, which clearly advocates self-sufficiency as an ideal).

<sup>47</sup> On kennings in *Hávamál* see, for instance, Hallberg 1983:61.



is supported. The similarities may encourage us to think not in terms of problems, of texts that need emending or lines that need reshuffling, but in terms of the shared characteristics of transitional products. Moreover, if we exclude direct reception we are left with a cultural constant: the transmission of wisdom. And with recurring elements such as gnomic language, myth, and catalog, we are also left with constant expressions of that wisdom.

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